

# HI-TECH JUNKIES



Nitin and Rohan Gupta, co-founders, Attero Recycling

## *Attero Recycling's founders get their fix from recycling e-waste*

*Ravi Teja Sharma*

With changing technology, the pace at which older electronic products are getting obsolete and reaching junkyards is increasing too. About three million computers are taken off the market every year and worse still, three million mobile phones are replaced every month. Where do these mobiles, laptops, desktops, and other electronic items end up after they are discarded? Usually at the neighbourhood kabadiwala who salvages whatever metal and plastic he can by either open burning or acid washing. The rest, which contains harmful elements such as lead, is junked in garbage dumps. In a country where recycling e-waste is managed entirely in the unorganised sector, there is a huge opportunity in organising the activity and that is what Rohan Gupta discovered.

Roping in his brother Nitin, Gupta met with a number of companies in the field internationally. Attero Recycling was born in February 2008. Even before setting up the plant and starting operations, they managed to raise \$6.3 million from VC firms NEA-IndoUS Venture and Draper Fisher Jurvetson. A major portion of the funding has been used to develop the technology in-house, open offices and build a state-of-the-art integrated e-waste recycling facility at Roorkee which has the capacity to recycle 36,000 tonnes a year. "We have developed the technology for recycling non-reusable plastic as well as our own metallurgical process," says Gupta. While most unorganised recyclers manage to extract only a few of the materials, Attero's plant is equipped to extract 98% of materials such as copper, lead, nickel, zinc, plastic, iron, silver and even gold to an extent.

To collect e-waste from various sources, Attero has signed up third party logistics provider Vikram Logistics, which will pick up even one PC from homes, as well as scrap from other sources. "We also need to work with the local kabadiwalas to collect e-waste. There is no collection system in India and these people have the right reach," says Gupta. Attero has tied up with LG for a mobile 'take-back' campaign with drop boxes at 50 LG centres. Recently, a collection drive in Gurgaon also saw a good response, says Gupta.

The company has collected 300-400 tonnes of e-waste and plans to do about 1,000 tonnes a month initially and reach 3,000 tonnes a month in the next 4-5 years. It has also tied up with corporates such as LG, Perot Systems, KPMG, Visa and Tata DIESL to collect e-waste and in turn plants trees for free within their campuses for each computer they pick up.

After it received a clearance from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) this May, Attero started processing ewaste at its new factory in Roorkee. Gupta declined to share revenue projections saying it will only be possible after at least six months of steady operations. "The revenue will depend on the kind of e-waste we will receive. If we get more monitors and white goods, the logistics and recycling costs could go up compared to, say, mobile phones and PCs," he says.

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